

*BRATACHĀRI PUBLICATIONS*

# THE BRATACHĀRI MOVEMENT

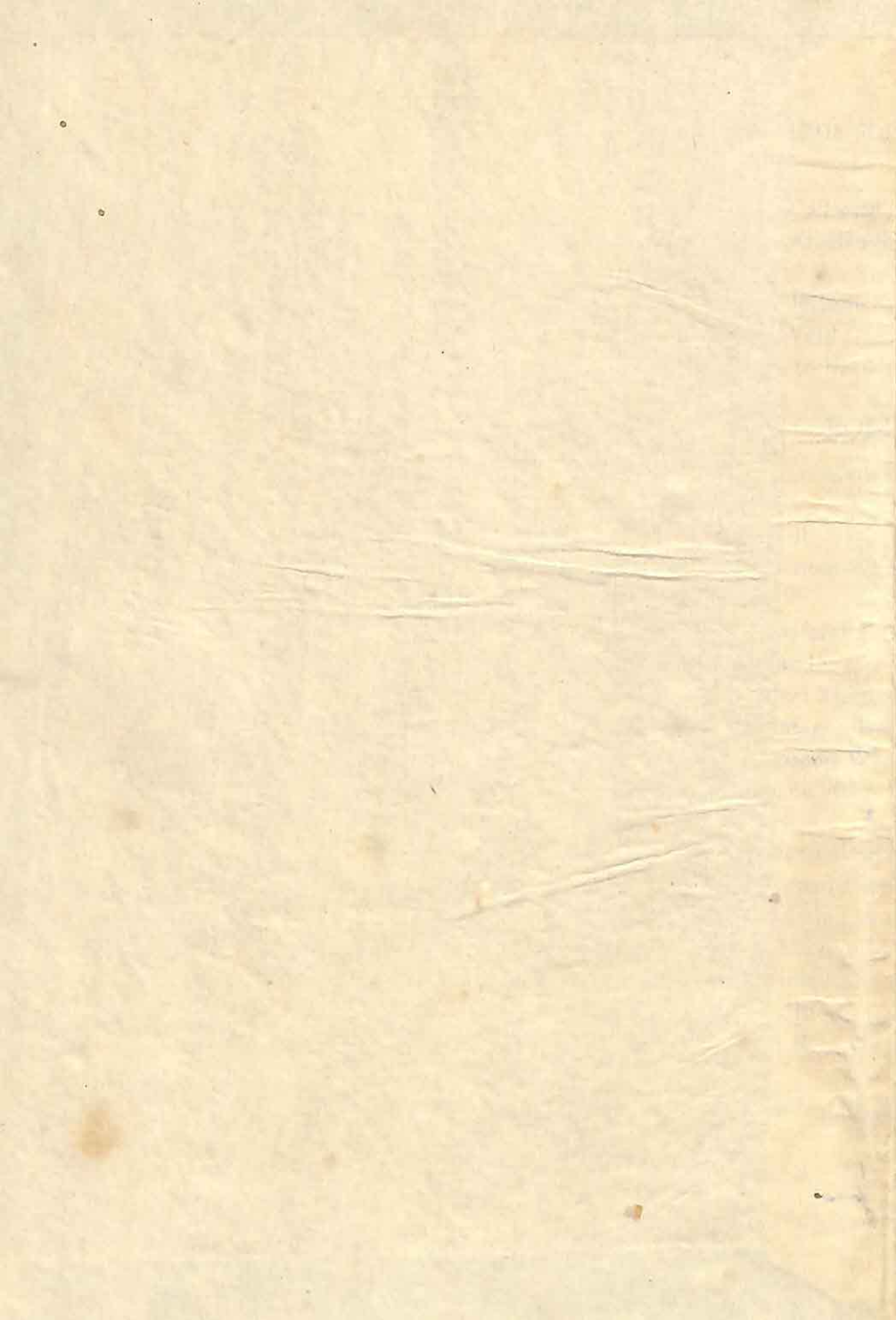
**RAMANANDA CHATTERJI**

Editor, *Modern Review*,  
Calcutta.

*EIGHT ANNAS*

**BENGAL BRATACHĀRI SOCIETY**

12, LOUDON STREET, CALCUTTA.



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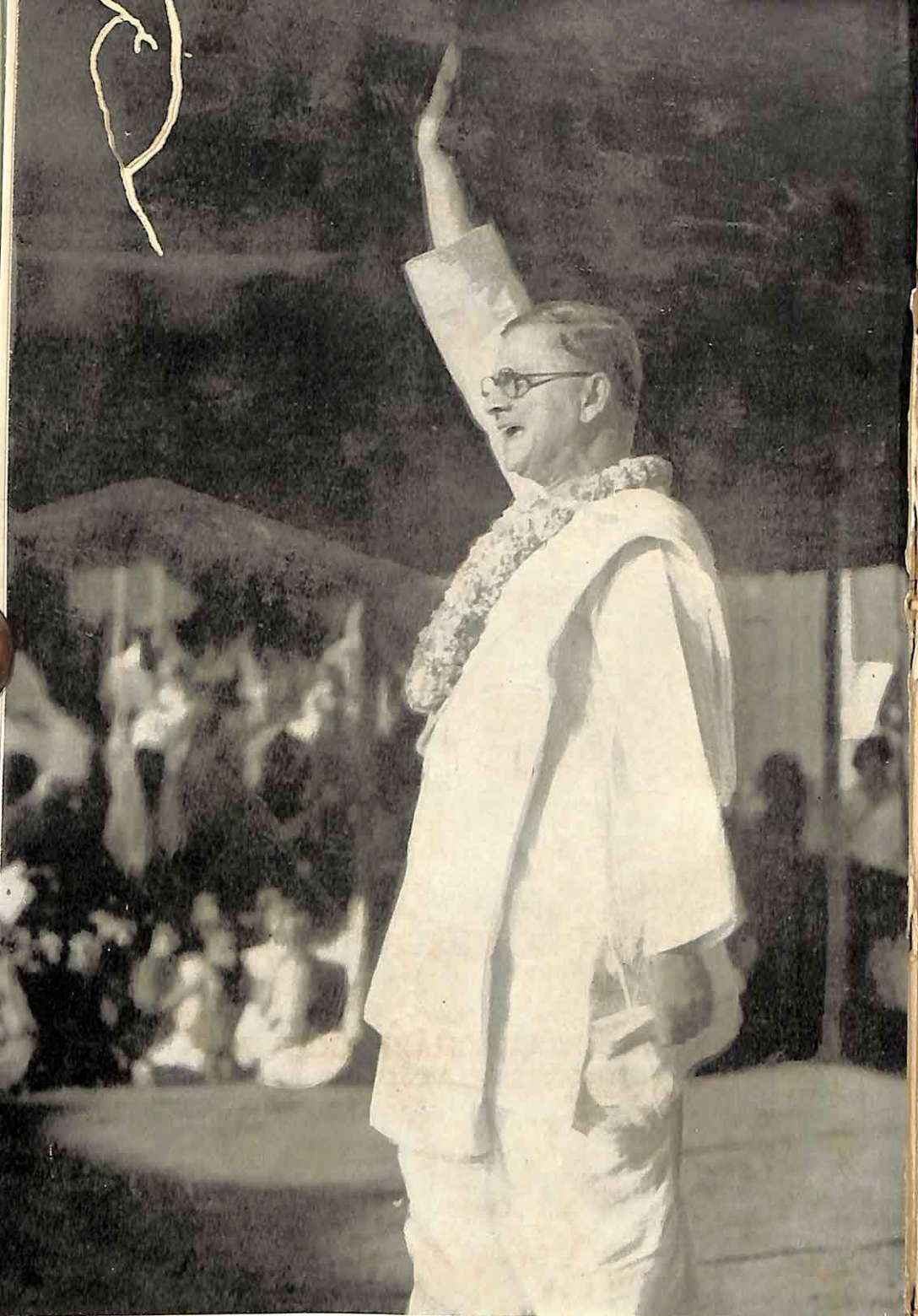


THE BRATACHĀRI MOVEMENT











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BY

RAMANANDA CHATTERJI

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Calcutta



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12, LOUDON STREET, CALCUTTA.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXL  
By BENGAL BRATĀCHARI SOCIETY,  
12, LOUDON STREET, CALCUTTA.  
PRINTED IN INDIA BY  
PRABARTAK PRINTING WORKS  
52/3, BOWBAZAR STREET : CALCUTTA

C. G. B. S. V. D. LIBRARY

Date 28.2.2002

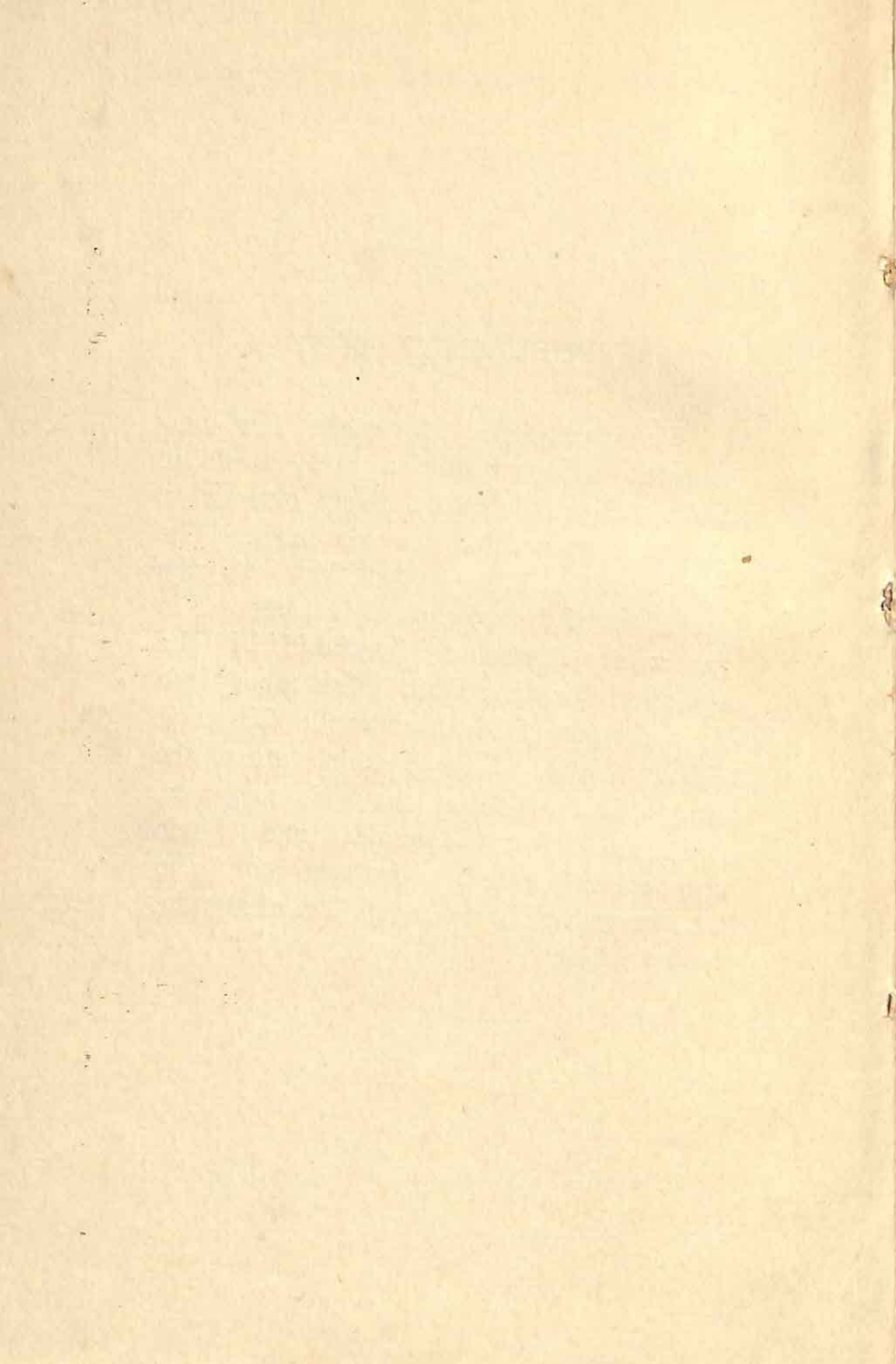
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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The Bratachari Movement has now attained wide recognition and people in India and outside take a lively interest in literature concerning the movement. The most authoritative exposition of the principles of the movement is embodied in the work 'Bratachari Synthesis' by the Founder, Mr. G. S Dutt. This monograph from the pen of Mr. Ramananda Chatterji, Editor, *Modern Review*, which formed the basis of an article in the *Asia* magazine, published from America, and which emphasises certain features of the movement will, it is hoped, be of interest to the public.



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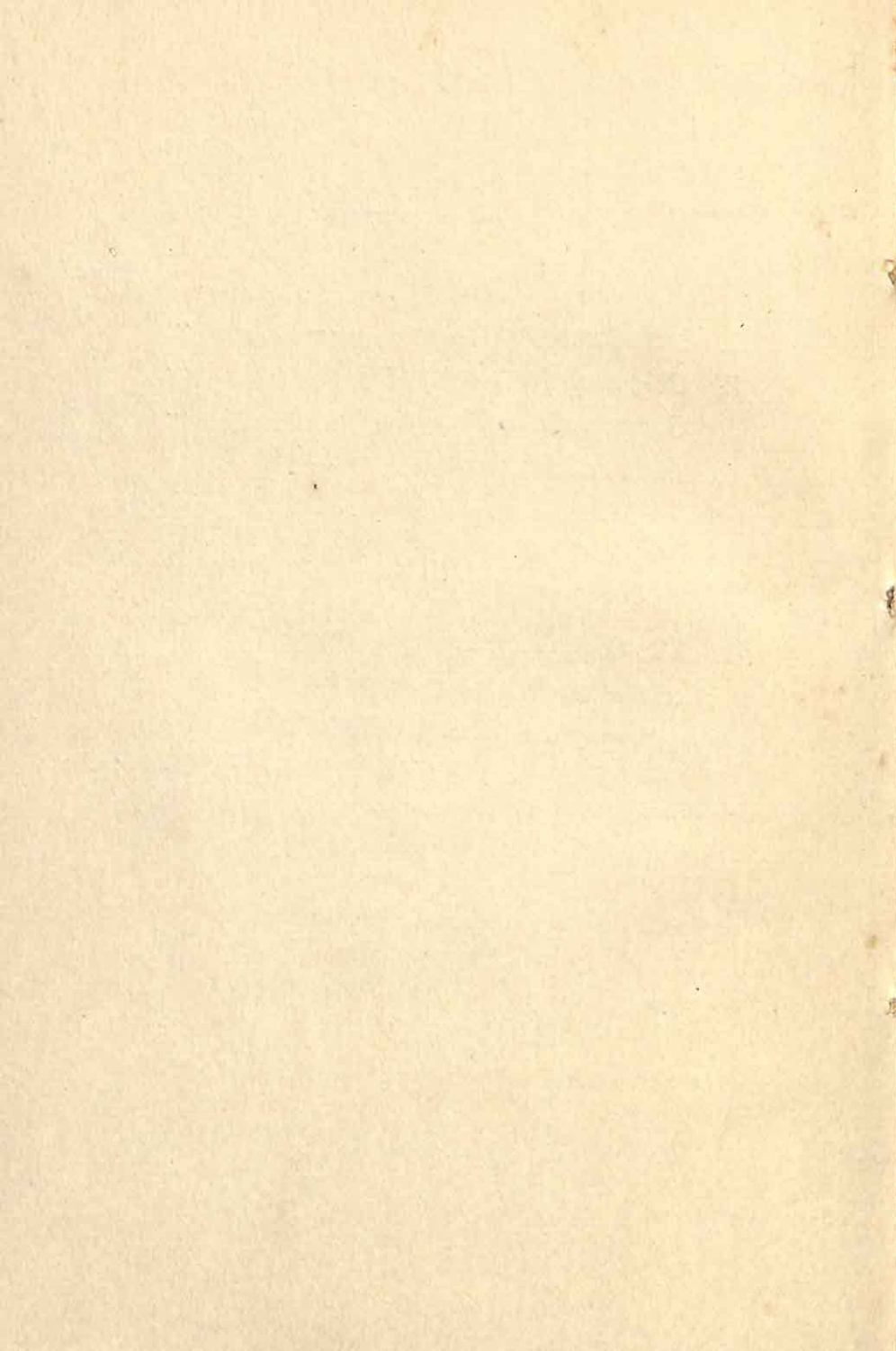
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1. Mr. G. S. Dutt, Founder-President  
of the Bratachari movement,  
taking salute from the Bratacharis.

*Frontispiece*







## THE BRATACHARI MOVEMENT

### INTRODUCTORY

The people of India do not themselves realize how joyless their lives are in comparison with the lives of the people of free and prosperous countries. But when keen observers from such foreign countries visit India, they notice the difference and sometimes record it in their writings. Some thirty-five years ago, Sir Frederick Treves, Sergeant-Surgeon to King Edward VII of England, visited India in the course of a tour round the world and gave an account of his travels in his book, *The Other Side of the Lantern*. There are, in that book, observations like the following :

“A further impression which soon possesses the traveller in India is that of the melancholy which hangs over both the land and its people”. (p. 38)

“Sadder than the country are the common people of it. They are lean and weary-looking, their clothing is scanty, they all seem poor, and ‘toiling for leave to live’. They talk little and laugh less. Indeed, a smile, except on the face of a child, is uncommon. They tramp along in the dust with little apparent object other than to tramp. Whither they go, Heaven knows, for they look like men who have

been wandering for a century. Their meagre figures are found against the light of the dawn, and move across the great red sun as it sets on the west, and one wonders if they still tramp on through the night". (p. 39)

One entire section of Chapter XIX of Sir Michael Sadler's Calcutta University Commission Report, published fifteen years later, is devoted to the description and causes of the "joylessness of student life" in Bengal.

If the Bratachari Movement, started by Mr. G. S. Dutt, I. C. S., its founder and president, had done nothing except infusing some joy into the lives of our people, particularly of our youth, its existence would have been amply justified. But it has done and aims at doing more for them, as will appear from the following brief account of its origin, growth, aims and methods.

#### ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT

The origin of the movement is intimately bound up with the experiences of Mr. Dutt's early childhood in his native village of Birasri in the District of Sylhet, in a very remote corner of the old province of Bengal. That village was still untouched by modern education and the economic forces of modern civilization. The old Indian traditions of social life still persisted there in a large measure in the lives of the



village people. Life was not pursued, as in the modern world, in separate compartments. Work, play and worship, art and religion, were intimately integrated with each other and with a joyous community life and a profound feeling of spiritual fellowship.

Every one, including Mr Dutt's father and uncle, who were the village landlords, worked at the plough in the fields with their own hands during the day and in the evening men of all castes and creeds joined in dancing traditional village dances to the accompaniment of simple *kirtan* songs of adoration. His father not only joined in the dances along with his tenants of the humblest castes, but actually rolled on the ground in a mood of devotion so as to cover himself with the dust of the tenants' feet. His mother also participated in community songs and dances with the women of all classes of the village on the occasion of religious festivals. These village dances and songs were of a simple and spiritual character and Mr. Dutt owes much of the spiritual and moral inspiration of his life to his simple association in early childhood with these dances and with the songs which formed their accompaniment. When he came to the towns for his further education, he found that these village dances and songs were regarded by the new education and by the newly educated classes with contempt, as belonging to a

barbarous and out-of-date civilization ; so that whenever a person became "educated", he ceased to have any further connection with these simple and unsophisticated rural arts. Thus a generation grew up who either had no knowledge of these vigorous and beautiful national art traditions of their own province which were still practised in living forms by the simple people in the rural areas or failed to see any artistic beauty or value in them. As the education of the cities gradually spread to the remote villages in the early part of the 20th century, village men and women, particularly of the upper classes, were themselves infected with an inferiority complex and gradually gave up these valuable ancient traditions until they only survived in a more or less moribund and decadent form among the poorest and the most backward classes. In fact, the inferiority complex generated by the new education infected Mr. Dutt's own subconscious mind and by the time he joined the Indian Civil Service in 1905 he himself had no eye for the true value of the ancient culture of our country, including the simple rural songs and dances in which he had joyfully participated in his childhood with his father.

Dancing had, in fact, ceased to be reputable, particularly among women of the higher castes. Rabindranath Tagore had some difficulty in introducing it among the girl students of his institu-



tion, and though dancing by young girls of respectable families has now become rather common, he is still criticized. It should be noted here that, unlike the Bratachari dances, the dances introduced by Tagore are not folk dances.

It was during Mr. Dutt's fourth visit to England in January, 1929, *i.e.*, twenty-four years after his joining the Indian Civil Service, that he had an opportunity of witnessing the All-England Folk Dance festival at the Royal Albert Hall, London, and of observing how the movement for the revival of the well-nigh extinct folk songs and dances of England, started by Cecil Sharp, was being enthusiastically supported and followed by the most cultured classes in that country. The demonstration of the folk dances and songs vividly recalled to his mind the equally simple, beautiful and vigorous but more spiritual folk dances and songs of his native village and numerous other villages of Bengal. It had a magical effect on him. As he watched these simple demonstrations, he felt a sudden breaking within him of the heavy chain of inferiority complex with which the modern high school and university education of India had bound his soul. It generated within him a new respect for the living culture and traditions of his native land and a new spirit of self-respect which he had never felt before ; and sitting there in that Hall in London, he formed in his mind

a firm resolution to inaugurate on his return to India a similar movement for the conservation of the folk dances and songs of Bengal which, unlike the well-nigh extinct traditions of English folk dances and songs revived by the English Folk Dance Society, were still vigorous living traditions practised by large sections of the village people.

#### GROWTH OF THE MOVEMENT

When, on his return to India, he was posted to the District of Mymensingh as its District Officer, he was fortunate in discovering the beautiful virile traditions of *Jari* dances among the adult Muslims of that district as well as the Baul dances among the Hindus. He accordingly organized the Mymensingh Folk Dance and Song Society in November, 1929 and arranged performances of these dances at his residence. He himself took part in these community dances and urged the gentry of the District, Hindus and Muslims, and particularly the young men, to do so.

At the outset both Government as well as the public at large seriously doubted his sanity and looked upon this unusual and unconventional behaviour on the part of a senior District Officer as extremely queer and embarrassing. He, however, persisted in these practices, heedless of criticism and unbelief on all sides, and discovered in these national



traditions a potent weapon for breaking down the deep-seated inferiority complex of his countrymen and creating in them a robust sense of self-respect and also for generating energy for work and for social service as well as for forging social unity between men in different classes in society.

In addition to the old caste divisions, Indians suffer from another dividing factor. Those who have received their education in English unconsciously become a class apart from those who are illiterate or literate only in their mother tongues. The community dances, songs and social service work of the Bratachari movement were found to serve as a bond of union among all castes, creeds and classes.

Mr. Dutt had been actively interested for some years before that time in village reconstruction work in various districts of Bengal and had initiated and led the first village reconstruction movement in India in the District of Birbhum in 1916-20 and in Bankura in 1921-23. He had found, however, that the energy generated by these movements among the village people flagged and often entirely vanished after his transfer to some other district and that the stereotyped methods of village reconstruction work did not really call into operation the inner springs of energy and unity of the people themselves. After the discovery of the energising and unifying forces of rhythmic community dances and songs he accor-

dingly set about composing a number of songs to be sung by the workers in the field of village reconstruction and social reform. One of the songs related to the destruction of the water hyacinth pest and another to the emancipation of women. A still another was a community prayer song which could be sung in common by Hindus and Moslems without any prejudice to their religious persuasions. These and other songs relating to social uplift, formation of character and urge to manual work and social service composed by him were taught to school students to be sung to the accompaniment of simple rhythmic dances with vigorous appropriate attitudes. At the same time, he was fortunate in discovering in quick succession several valuable old folk dances, including the *Raibenshe* and the *Kathi* dances. The former is a spirited and stimulating war dance of the *lancers* who fought under the ancient Hindu and Muslim potentates of Bengal. At about the same time he made a series of discoveries in the field of Bengalee folk art in the shape of valuable ancient traditions of rural painting, wood sculpture and the like, and founded, in January, 1932, the Rural Heritage Preservation Society of Bengal, for the practice of the folk songs and folk dances and the conservation of the folk arts by the educated classes. In Mr. Buchanan, Director of Physical Education, Bengal, he found an enthusiastic supporter



of his plan to introduce into the schools throughout Bengal the folk dances discovered by him as well as the practice of singing the community songs and dances devised by him, so much so that Mr. Buchanan obtained from the Department of Education of the Government of Bengal full recognition of these folk dances as an integral part of its physical education syllabus.

Accordingly, under the auspices of this Society a Folk Dance Training Camp was opened in 1932 for giving instruction to school teachers and others in folk dances, sports and songs of the province. Along with the instruction in these subjects Mr. Dutt felt it necessary to present before the campers a complete ideal of life, at once spiritual and practical, at once national and international, involving an integrated culture of the body, mind and spirit; and with that object in view a set of vows was composed by him on a rhythmic pattern inculcating the ideal of the complete man. To convey this ideal in its entirety the word 'Bratachari' was devised by him to signify one who has resolved to pursue a code of discipline for the accomplishment of a high purpose in life, viz., the pursuit of the complete life. The discipline in this case was to consist of work and joy integrated together. Stress was laid in the vows on the duty of doing manual work and the dignity of work of all descriptions, including such work as scavenging,

acquisition of knowledge, village reconstruction work, cultivation of fruits and vegetables, clearing weeds from tanks, emancipation of women, care of cows, cleanliness and tidiness, physical culture, pursuit of arts and crafts, dedication of self to service, removal of inequality in all forms and, finally, infusing the spirit of joy into life and work through community singing and community dancing.

Successive annual camps were held thereafter and the movement steadily expanded until in 1934 it assumed its present form of a complete code of life expressed in a series of rhythmic vows. A rhythmic discipline was made the basis of the whole movement.

In 1933 when Mr. Dutt was a member of the Central Assembly of the Indian Legislature at Delhi, he was able to interest the people of Delhi in the movement, with the result that a Delhi Folk Dance Society was formed there. Under the auspices of this Society, several parties of folk dancers from Bengal were taken to Delhi and a series of demonstrations were given there, resulting in the formation of the All-India Folk Dance Society with Mr. Dutt as President, Captain (now Sir) Sher Mohammad Khan, M.L.A. of the Punjab as Vice-President, and several leading members of the Central Legislature as members. It was in 1934 that the five paths of discipline underlying the vows and songs through which the movement was expressed were distinctly specified. These



five BRATAS are KNOWLEDGE, LABOUR, TRUTH, UNITY and JOY and these form the basic pursuits of a Bratachari. Besides the 16 VOWS, the gist of which has been mentioned above, the Bratachari has to observe 17 DON'TS. Thus the Bratachari has to take the vows not to speak in a language indiscriminately compounded of his mother tongue as well as another language (as is often the case in this country), not to develop a paunch, not to eat except when hungry, not to spend more than one earns, not to indulge in luxury, not to forget to smile even in misfortune, not to harbour false thoughts, not to be puffed up with pride, not to behave discourteously, not to depend on chance or luck, not to remain idle without striving, not to turn away from failure and not to adopt begging as a livelihood. The vows and prohibitions prescribed for women Bratacharis are in some instances different from those of men. Thus, women have to promise to be graceful in behaviour, not to melt with excessive softness, not to rush about neglecting the homemaker's work. The Junior Bratacharis, boys as well as girls, have to take 12 vows. These enjoin them to love and serve one and all, to obey one's elders, to read and write and learn, to be kind to animals, to speak the truth, to tread the path of truth, to make things with their own hands, to build up strong bodies, to fight for the team, to live

by the labour of one's limbs and to dance with joy.

#### AIMS AND METHODS

All the vows are repeated rhythmically with simultaneous simple co-ordinated movements of the right arm and the legs. A group of people going through the same simple movements and repeating the same formulas and singing the same songs with the same simple dance movements at the same time, constitutes, in the opinion of the founder, a course of self-discipline and self-purification through rhythmic auto-suggestion, personal and collective, simultaneously in three realms of being, *viz.*, thought, speech and behaviour. He further thinks that such constant and earnest repetition of an ideological formula with simultaneous vigorous affirmation in thought, speech and behaviour tends to transmute the ideology of the vows and songs into the subconscious self and effects a silent but effective transformation of the entire personality, thus fulfilling the true aim of education, which, in Ribot's phrase, is "to transmute the conscious into the unconscious and thus to establish harmony between the two states."

The ancient Greek Orphic cult insisted on the joyousness inherent in all life and living being. One of the modes of expressing this joyousness was



concerted dancing in the forests on the slopes of the hills of Greece. When Euripides wrote :

"Whoever shall know,            That to live is happy  
As the long days go,            Hath found his Heaven"  
he voiced the Orphic view of life.

Similarly, the system of ancient Greek education was based on the belief that training in simple forms of singing and dancing is a *sine qua non* of human education. Recognizing that physical culture divorced from music tends to produce coarseness of personality, the Bratachari movement, in common with the system of education in vogue in ancient Greece, makes simple and vigorous dances and songs with a high moral content and objective an inseparable part of education ; and, like the Greek system, it places special value on traditional dances and traditional songs in view of their effectiveness in promoting a healthy sense of national and regional integration and unity. Special care is taken, however, not to create a narrow regional patriotism. The first promise which a Bengali Bratachari has to make is to love not only Bengal, but also India and the world at large ; to serve not only Bengal, but also India and the world as a whole ; and to be a Bratachari or complete citizen not of Bengal only, but also of India and the world as a whole. Thus the movement, while aiming at the development of a healthy regional patriotism, is deliberately framed



to avoid the pitfalls into which a narrow nationalism is prone to lead in these days. It does not identify itself with any political party or any religious creed. Its ranks are open to men and women of all political parties in the country and all religions and creeds. It has been recommended by leaders of all religious communities in British India and some Indian States. The movement in Bengal has been joined in large numbers not only by the Bengalees but also by people from other provinces of India and other countries outside India. It does not generate any narrow spirit of boycott or antipathy towards the culture of other provinces of India and other nations. On the other hand, the movement is based on the principle that the culture of every land represents the distinctive rhythmic expression of the Universal Spirit appertaining to that land and that it is the duty of the people of every land to help in the conservance and maintenance of the culture of every other land and to regard it with reverence and respect.

Since the inception of the movement it has gained in popularity among all classes of the people. During the last seven years nearly thirty training camps have been held for men with the co-operation and financial assistance of the Department of Education and of the Municipalities and District Boards as well as of the Hindu and Muslim



communities and Christian missionary organizations throughout the province and over one thousand leaders have been trained. Six training camps have been held for women with the active co-operation of the Physical Directress of the Young Women's Christian Association, Calcutta. The trained women leaders and teachers number three hundred. The movement is also given substantial financial help by the Corporation of Calcutta which has strong nationalistic sympathies.

Out of the 27 districts of Bengal, 17 have already organized District Bratachari Samitis, some with Hindu Secretaries and some with Moslem or Christian Secretaries. The total number of enrolled Bratacharis in the province already exceeds a hundred thousand.

The contribution of the movement in promoting the physical development of its members and in furnishing a simple, natural, joyous and inexpensive system of simultaneous physical and mental discipline for the harmonious building up of the physique and character as well as in supplying forms of joyous community activity in which all can join irrespective of caste or creed, has been universally recognised. In the words of Sir Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the movement attempts to transform the mind, body and soul of the average Indian, villager as well as town-dweller, and to instil into those brought within



its influence the essential qualities of fearlessness, courage, discipline, team spirit, a sense of power and a spirit of dedication to the uplift of the country transcending narrow divisions of race, caste or creed.

The movement lays special stress on the performance of manual labour and social service, which has been one of its prominent characteristics ever since its inception. Throughout Bengal the Bratacharis have been active in making vegetable gardens, destroying the water hyacinth, clearing insanitary pools, cutting down jungles, making and repairing roads and communications, giving first-aid to the wounded and in nursing the sick and the suffering. In the District of Howrah the Bratacharis took the leading part in clearing the Saraswati river of weeds. On the occasion of the Foundation Day of the movement in February last, the Bratacharis carried out a practical campaign of public health in the city of Calcutta by cleaning the slums with their own hands and by giving health instruction to the inhabitants of the backward areas in the city.

The principal features of the movement are its emphasis on an all-comprehensive synthesis through joy and its insistence on rhythmic accord so as to do away with the treatment and pursuit of life in separate compartments. It seeks to integrate the

physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life, work and worship, and duty and play, by bringing about rhythmic accord and by transfusing the spirit of joy into them all.

The discipline of rhythmic accord which is embodied in the Bratachari dances and songs tends to unite individuals, groups and nations into a harmonious unity, unlike the modern competitive sports and games which tend to generate a spirit of mutual aggressiveness and combativeness.

The youthfulness of nations is indicated, among other things, by grandfathers "frisking beneath the burden of three scores". The Bratachari movement has led to rejuvenation of body and mind and counteracted the untimely assumption of elderliness. It has induced a spirit of self-respect, mutual regard, unity, harmony and joy among all classes who have adopted it. It has proved most effective in integrating the personality of the young as well as of the old by furnishing a self-contained ideal of life and conduct polarised to a simultaneously spiritual and practical ideal.

The educational value of the movement has been recognized by eminent men and educationists both in India and abroad. Dr. Rabindranath Tagore has declared his conviction that "wherever the movement is adopted, it will conduce to the development of joy of spirit, capacity for work,



strength of character and enthusiasm for social service". The late President of the Indian National Congress, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, has publicly declared that the Bratachari movement "aims at development of a good physique and service of the country," and both he and Dr. Syed Mahmud, the indefatigable Minister of Education in the late Congress Government in Behar, have strongly advocated the introduction of the movement in that province in the interest of national education.

At the thirteenth session of the All-India Educational Conference held in 1937, it was resolved that "as Bratachari combines physical, moral and spiritual training with a strong national background and has been found suitable for all grades of educational institutions, steps should be taken to introduce the movement on as wide a scale as possible, and this Conference recommends it for consideration in all parts of India".

The movement is, in fact, so designed that it can be adopted by all provinces of India and by other countries, with suitable modifications in the vows so as to bring them into accord with local needs, and it is intended to be expressed in each regional area through the language and cultural traditions of that region. A Bratachari Society has been already formed in the province of Behar and educational institutions from several other provinces, including



far off Sind, have had their teachers trained in the system. The leading Indian states of Baroda and Hyderabad have arranged educational visits by the Founder-President and a party of Bratacharis and they have expressed deep interest in the extension of the movement into their areas.

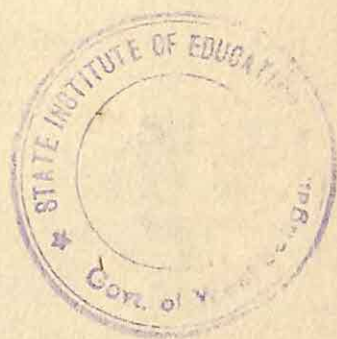
The movement differs from other youth movements of the world by its avoidance, on the one hand, of a stereotyped cosmopolitanism which ignores the diversities of cultural outlook and traditions of every distinctive regional area of the world, and on the other hand, of the spirit of rampant militarism and fanatical and narrow nationalism which sees nothing good in the spiritual and cultural outlook and contribution of other nations of the world. It avoids the two extremes and reconciles the best that is in them by taking its stand on the basic unifying factor of life, namely, rhythm and joy, and by emphasising at the same time the spiritual values of life as well as the value of the diversities in regional cultures.

During the founder's visit to Europe in 1935 he gave a series of lectures and demonstrations on the movement in England and Denmark, as a result of which much interest was roused in the movement in those countries. A Bratachari Society was formed in London consisting of English people, and several leading men, including Sir Michael Sadler, enrolled themselves as Bratacharis. Mr. Laurence Binyon,

the well-known English poet and art-critic, declared in a public speech that the Bratachari movement would help humanity "to recover the sense of the wholeness of life and its lost harmony with nature".

At the present day, not only the youth of the world but humanity in general are torn asunder between the two rival and opposing ideals of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. This conflict and discord have been caused by an excessive reliance on the external factors of life and on merely external methods. There is need for an inward approach and for the setting in motion of factors which lie at the roots of life. The secret of the unity of humanity and fellowship among nations must be sought in something deeper than mere acquisition of skills or game competitions or in the adoption of uniform dress, conventions or formulas or in mere avowals of international fellowship. It must be sought in the deep-rooted synthetic factors which form the basis of life, in an inner rhythmic harmony between the physical and spiritual life and in a simultaneous attunement of life to the rhythm of the ecos and the cosmos. The synthetic factors of rhythmic accord and the spirit of joy which alone can help in the realization of such inner attunement have been embodied in the Bratachari system of discipline and training for individuals as well as groups and is

capable of adoption in every country in the world with modifications to suit local conditions and the distinctive idiom of the regional culture of each country.







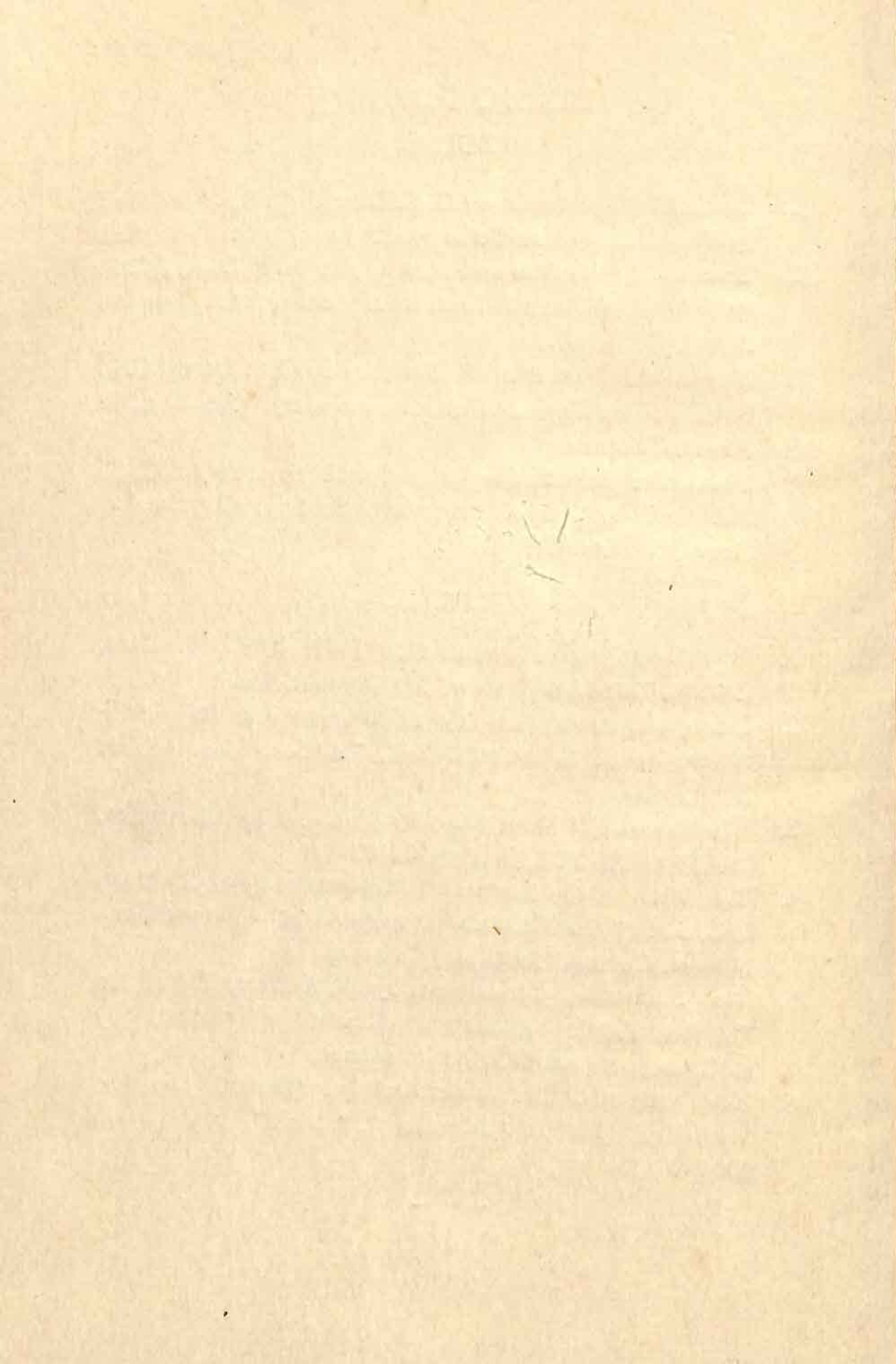
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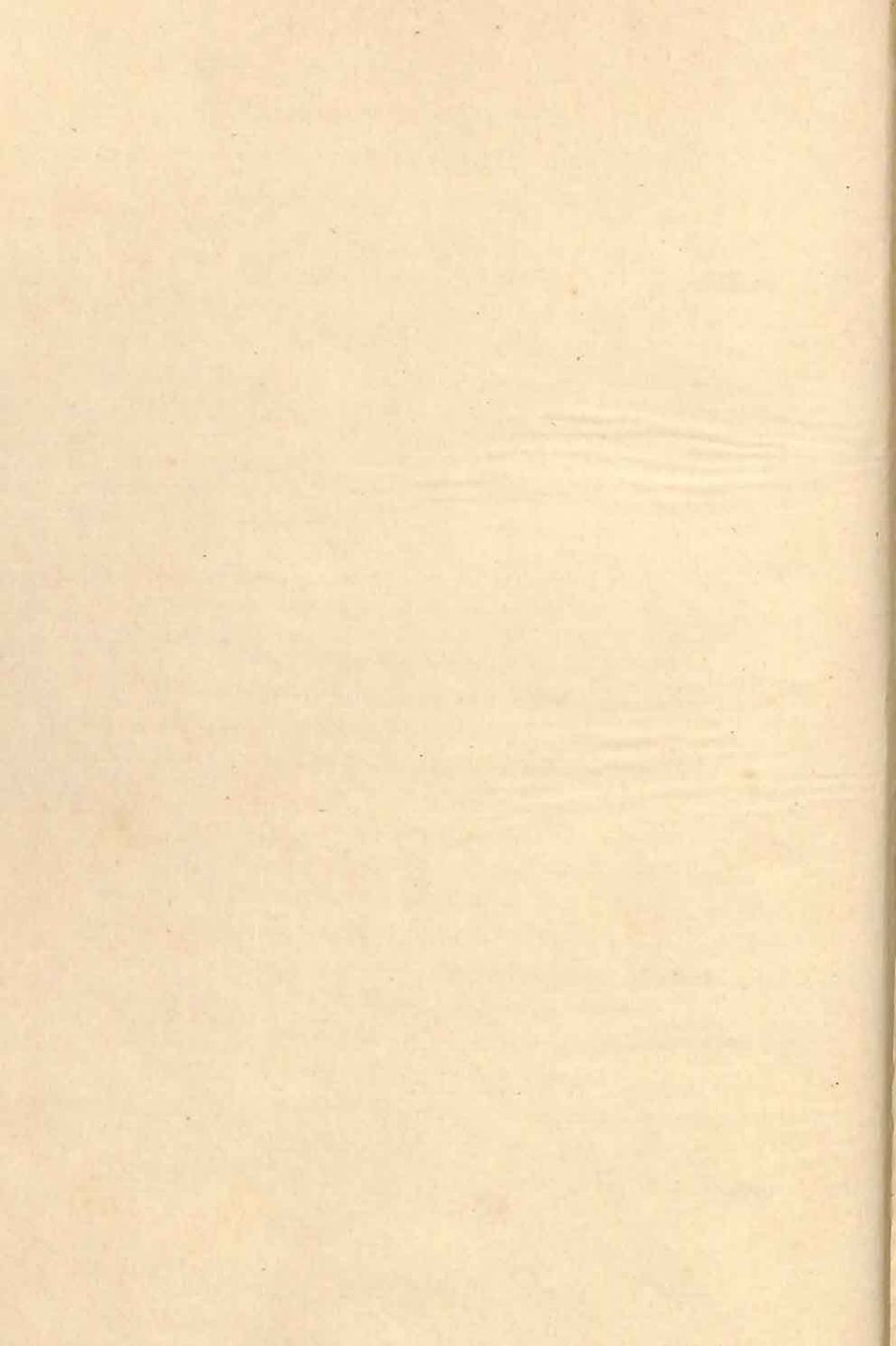
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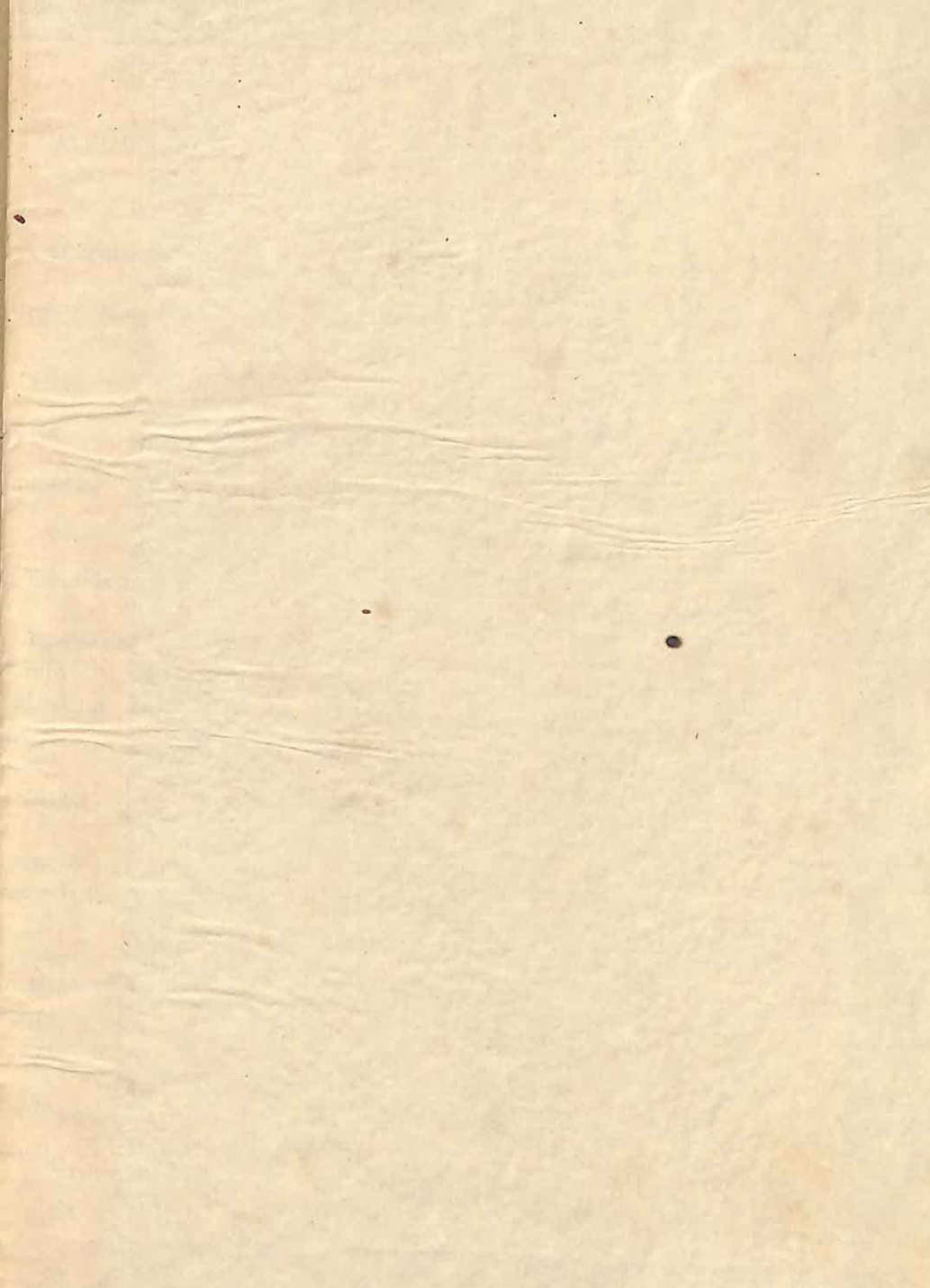
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## OPINIONS ON THE BRATACHARI MOVEMENT

PROF. SIR SARVAPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN :—

I believe this movement to be a very significant expression of the Indian renaissance now manifesting itself on every side of our life. We have heard much of bringing about a revolution in our country from the top. It is, however, being increasingly recognised that any kind of real change must start from the bottom and affect the mind of the mass of the people. The Bratachari movement attempts to transform the mind, body and soul of the average Indian, villager as well as town-dweller, and to instil into those brought within its influence the essential qualities of fearlessness, courage, discipline, team-spirit, a sense of power and a spirit of dedication to the uplift of our common mother-land. The founder of the movement, whose enthusiasm is infectious, has taken great care to root it in the native soil, both physical and intellectual. He has revived the old traditions and has adapted them to modern ideals of social service and citizenship. Here is a movement which any one can join irrespective of race, caste or creed and help to develop a larger patriotism overcoming narrow divisions.

It seems to me that the Bratachari movement contains in itself all the elements of a purely indigenous youth movement for India and is particularly valuable because it is based on the ideal of an integral education.

Our young men and women to-day suffer from a lack of colour and poetry in their lives. This movement will help to restore these lost elements to life. I believe that if all our schools and colleges take to this movement in a larger measure, they will help in contributing to the building of a rejuvenated Indian nation of which we shall all be proud.

THE RT. HON'BLE SIR AKBAR HYDARI :—

I feel that 500 years hence, when we shall not be living, our great-grand-children will enjoy the benefit of this movement and I wish and pray that this movement may grow and grow until it spreads throughout the whole land of our Bharatmata and brings about that unity for which we are all longing, namely, a country with one people and with one mind.